

Searching for a parking space

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Deciding, perceiving or searching?

If you drive a car, it's a classic problem on the busy city streets, the search for a parking space. Merely driving in the inner city is a challenging and frustrating affair because it is full of one way streets, dead ends, the visibility of surrounding streets is impeded by buildings and as we drive we are pushed ceaselessly forward from behind by other vehicles. If we pause for thought for more than a second we will be reprimanded by one or more car horns. How it is that masses of us move, as pedestrian or vehicular traffic, in an orderly way through space is *also* a classic problem for research in psychology, geography and other social sciences. From a distance it seems that the large movements of thousands of vehicles on the road must require explanations arising from another level, a macro-level. From close-by, observing the driver we wonder how she could possibly deal with such a fast complicated environment in their head. How many decisions would they have to make every second? For decision-making models of driving and transportation the point that getting a hold of a space to park our cars is, unavoidably, a *search* during which decisions are made, is all too often forgotten. As Thompson and Richardson (1998: 129) note dryly, 'previous models of parking choice have not considered it as a search'(p159).

We might want to ask whether decisions should be so privileged in the study of driving in traffic, since, while a decision is made at one moment in time, a search unfolds. If we spend a long time looking, what an acceptable 'finding' is changes. It has to change since we cannot look for a parking space forever, we have to find a way of ending our search for all practical purposes. It is common enough to end up parking several blocks away from our destination as one possible solution to the problem of limited on-street parking. The point is that for drivers searching for a space, parking several blocks away is not a solution when their search *begins*; it is a compromise that can only be such a thing once the search has been underway for long enough. The inescapability of having to do an *in vivo* search up and down parked streets, around blocks, in no longer than a few minutes and to "really, eventually have to park the car somewhere round here," is the lived experience that a formal analytic decision-making model unavoidably misses.

A question that this paper seeks to answer is how we might go about dropping, to adapt a phrase from Drew and Heritage (1992), 'the bucket' theory of space. That is, the bucket theory is a vague general way of treating space as the container for objects and events. My aim, then, is to avoid treating space as a passive backdrop or flat terrain which provides the objective base and unchanging co-ordinates which it is the searchers' job to locate themselves or other items on. Nor do I want to look for the transcendental phenomenologies of space in the arrangement of the figure/ground pair so central to Merleau Ponty's notions of the depths of space (Wylie 2003). However Merleau Ponty provides a useful starting point for turning away from the 'intellectualization of space' p127 (Lynch 1993) toward an embodied spatiality which is not a subjective deformation of objective coordinates. No longer

a bucket, space is *generated* by the motion of bodies, it is not that there are motions *in* space. For embodied subjects their motion is not the mere tool of a separate consciousness, making a movement, is doing something. Moving is acting. In the travelling of the search objects acquire spatial predicates such as orientation, fronts, entries and borders that are the identifying details of ‘the junction ahead’, ‘the last block’, ‘a space between cars’ and ‘a bus in front’. Following Lynch (1993) we part company with Merleau Ponty in giving up the pursuit of the “perception” of the naked subject via laboratory experiments since:

The laboratory setup inhibits head and body movements, so that the subject is precluded from using... “ambient” and “ambulatory” vision. These latter concepts include embodied practices of turning an object around in one’s hands and walking around in a field to disclose temporal and relational properties of the objects in a field. In other words, “perception” is itself a product of a disciplinary field in which a “subject” is constituted. (Lynch 1993: 129)

Occupants of vehicles searching for parking spaces are not doing ‘perceiving their environment’, they are doing ‘searching for a parking space’. This shift from perceiving to the specifics of each practice is about more than abandoning an investigation of the generalities of the human subject, searching for a parking space is enmeshed in a historical and local contexture of engineered infrastructures, technologies, highway rules, and unfolding action. The search takes place in the spatial formation that is the city centre and its traffic. Not, to fall back in the bucket just as we’ve climbed out of it, as if these are passive settings within which the search is done but that the search as an array of procedures produces relevant features in the city centre (e.g. spaces between parked cars are investigated as potential parking spaces). As several related writers have made clear; spaces are there as resources for, *and*, as products of a myriad of practices (Crabtree 2000; Hindmarsh and Heath 2000; Büscher 2001; Mondada 2003; Carlin 2003; Livingston 1987).

By way of briefly situating my work within a tradition of inquiry I take an ethnomethodological approach to space and action (Livingston 1987; Lynch 1993; Garfinkel 2002). It is an approach that is wary of theoretical stipulation and is committed to maintaining the intactness of phenomena in its investigations¹. By contrast with other endeavours that take a ‘theoretical attitude’ it seeks to avoid treating the actual organisation of space as theory’s accomplishment (Sharrock and Coleman 1999). In each and every case the successes and failures of courses of action are the on-site achievement of the particular population inhabiting (or as Garfinkel (2002) sometimes says ‘staffing’) that place.

¹ There is no positivist naivety here of an ‘unbiased’ depiction of nature (McHugh et al. 1974) and ethnomethodology’s basic tutorials are in the inescapable loss in rendering of any phenomenon (Garfinkel and Wieder 1992).

What the car sees

An ongoing concern of mine has been to examine the relations between events 'within the car' and what is happening 'outside the car'. In using this division of an inside and an outside, we have to be careful not to sunder the driver's living experience of driving in a car as a reflexive part of a self-organising society of traffic. The vehicle in motion is not an *extension* of their body but their very embodied sensation, as felt for its speed or slowness, its proximity to a car in front, approaching cars' intended courses of action, its fit to spaces. The experienced driver dwelling in their vehicle no longer notices the techniques they have to use to control clutch and accelerator, they no longer look at gaps without sensing whether they are tight or wide for *this* vehicle². Driving, as a body formed out of practices and as a body of practices, is a thoroughly learned and living inhabitation of vehicular equipmental complexes situated in traffic. The learner driver, struggling with foot pedals, forgetting to check in both directions before pulling out of a junction, missing the gates of gears and being honked at for the being in the wrong filter lane; they are well aware of the array of skills of handlings of controls and lookings at traffic required to drive a smooth journey around the city.³

What is intriguing about trucks, cars, ships, planes and buses compared to the fleshy vehicles of human bodies, is that we can and do routinely travel in them collectively with only one of us doing the driving⁴. Though only one of us has our hands on the wheel during collective transport it is a mistake to treat the journey as solely organised and the responsibility of the person who is the 'driver'. Just as persons can walk together along a street (Ryave and Schenkein 1974), or dance as a couple doing the tango, so they can drive together in a car. As Watson (1999: 58) puts it "driving is a division of labour." The novelty in the car, as in other vehicles such as boats, planes and tandems, is that whereas on foot the group can split, reform, switch from a single file to side-by-side, in the car the group is seated side-by-side in the vehicle. Meantime groups of vehicles become the units which can travel in files or side-by-side. Driving together then has these possible units for its display: the vehicle and the convoy. In the example presented below, there is only one car in which we travel as a *pair* one of whose 'jobs' is to do being a passenger and the other a driver and these categories will be examined further in what follows.

² Thrift (2004) nicely picking up on driving as a reconfiguration of de Certeau's consideration of the action and art of walking that configures a certain experience of the city. Latour (1997) reminding us, through the example of an opera singer's instruction, that to contrast the body as if it not something that we 'learn' to use, with equipment which we seemingly always have to learn to use and is separate from what is really us, is a confusing error.

³ As Jack Katz's (1999) work shows the angry response is becoming a regular feature of city driving. His work, while highlighting the oddity of car traffic compared to pedestrian traffic, in some ways obscures the many situations and methods in and by which drivers are also polite, generous and forgiving (Raffel 2001).

⁴ Though there are early templates for children in piggybacks and some comparisons to be made in the work of leading in paired dancing. In the case of the latter while one part of the couple 'drives' the other 'follows', and it makes little sense to say this of a passenger in a car, and more of a car behind a car which may follow the car in front.

The video clip which recorded the events recounted here, as a vignette and as transcribed conversations, was shot during an ethnographic study of mobile workers who used their cars as offices (Laurier and Philo 1998). Unlike Mondada's (2003) reflexive investigation of video through surgeons use of video to instruct other medical practitioners in laparoscopy (and in video itself), I will not be focusing on the "praxeology of seeing with a camera" (MacBeth 1999: 151). What I would like to work through is what we could call the praxeology of seeing *as a car in traffic*⁵. Seeing's work can be distributed between the driver and passenger, where the passenger is able to assist in looking around when the driver has to be devoted to the traffic and can offer their perspectives on the car's body and the exterior cityscape which potentially add to those of the driver.

A few remarks about the mobile worker are in order to set the scene for the parking search that ensues. "Marge"⁶ had been working for a trans-national drinks distribution company for a couple of months when I rode along with her to find out how she did her job. Her daily routines involve somewhere between six and twenty meetings with club, pub and bar owners at their venues. Most of her meetings were in the city centre with a few meetings farther out, almost in the suburbs⁷. As we join her she is driving about six blocks from her 'dry store'⁸ underneath a railway station toward her first meeting of the day. Although this is her first client, this driving task is a *repeated* feature of her day – this [searching for a parking space]⁹. As a repeated feature it can consume hours per month and so she hopes to minimise the time she has to spend doing it. As a regular feature of her job she has various bulky and sometimes heavy items to deliver so she is willing to try for the unlikely concurrence of a space adjacent to her destination. Other kinds of drivers with no loads to carry will analyse the search for a parking space differently and, for instance, could go for the first space they come across two blocks before their destination, or, as in the case of a delivery driver, could simply double park and jump out. Sometimes Marge's meetings take an hour and as a result double parking is not a method she can use.

⁵ See also (Livingston 1986), on seeing half a 'car' in a queue and half as a 'person' in a queue (Vesterlind 2003) and seeing dangerous features of mountain roads (Watson 1999).

⁶ Pseudonyms were used for all the project participants.

⁷ By way of further, perhaps superfluous information, the city centre of Glasgow has a very close fit between numbers of cars and numbers of spaces for cars (one of the ways that it, like many other cities, attempts to keep levels of car commuting down is by restricting numbers of parking spaces). There's an oddity of modern city life here; that you can undertake a long, slow journey that is a search for a slot of space. A further oddity is that a large amount of traffic in the city centre, is like those planes circling the skies above our cities, in a holding pattern.

⁸ Her company had two stores: a wet store containing all the drinks they distributed and a dry store with all the non-liquid items (e.g. forms, posters, CDs, T-shirts, ashtrays, glasses).

⁹ Square brackets are used to indicate an ethnomethodological suspension of a gloss of a particular practice, where once suspended we will examine the actual practice to see what it consist of.

Vignette



It's mid morning, we're on our way to a venue and I am asking Marge about whether her company picks up the costs for any parking tickets she is issued. They don't, unlike some of the other companies with car-based employees. As we enter the couple of blocks before her venue she grows quieter. When we drive into the specific street where her venue, having taken a look down the rows of cars (see above) she says under her breath "you can be guaranteed there are no parking spaces here". It only takes a minute or two for us to pass slowly along its length. At the point where we pass the bar where her meeting is Marge says ironically "smashing." Once we turn back into the urban clearway¹⁰ Marge zips along until we turn back into a street two blocks further on that has parking. There are a few spaces here which she passes since they are too far away.



There are a bunch of large machines excavating the road (see above) and Marge comments "plus building work doesn't help either." I wonder about what the various machines do as we slide by them. "Damn sometimes there are spaces in this wee bit here but no:::: today" adds Marge as we pass along a short stretch of shops just before we complete an orbit of the city blocks.

¹⁰ What is known in the UK as an 'urban clearway' is a main road where there is never any legal on-street parking.

Ahead of us at the end of our destination street we see a car waiting, apparently about to take a space that's just come free.

"Bitch!" calls out Marge in despair. A few moments later we realise the car is not taking the space after all. We drive up the venue's street for the second time and as we get to the end Marge says "How irritating. Nothing." We try orbiting in the reverse direction and end up stuck behind another car searching for a space. A final and third pass of the street reveals nothing again. Running out of time and patience Marge ends up settling for a tight gap (see below) between two cars almost a block and a half away from her destination. She asks "can I get in there", and I reply "it's a small car. Block up their passenger door."

"I've got stuff to get out of mine" she laughs. We manoeuvre a little more until I say "you're fine on this side. Just leave it like this." And we do.



The territory of the search

The city centre for the driver has architectural features more generally relevant to driving: one-way streets, rat runs, junctions, corners, dead ends, roundabouts, bus lanes, pedestrian zones, busy streets, quiet streets, narrow and wide streets, and so on. These are features that are predicated by this category of transport as against, walking, using an underground rail system (Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff 1999), a tram, a bicycle, an articulated lorry or a wheelchair. For Marge as a daily parker in the centre of Glasgow she knows the city centre by its quarters and in the vignette we see how the quarter is something she allocates borders to – we drive into it. The quarter that her destination lies in selects the quarter within which we will search for. The quarter provides us with expectations concerning its character as an easy or difficult region to find parking spaces. Equally the nature of our action as searching for a space rather than trying to escape a traffic jam, or pick up a prostitute, shapes our concern with what aspects of the quarter we are interested in.

The destination lies on a particular street, and the streets also carry expectations concerning their 'normal appearances' (Sacks 1972; Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff 1999). So it is that we find Marge saying "you can be guaranteed there are no parking spaces here". Her comment has its sense in her having tried to find a space here many times before and knowing that it would be extreme good fortune to find

a spot right outside her destination. Adjacent streets carry with them expectations of being able to find a space, though they are also subject to inescapable contingencies. “Damn sometimes there are spaces in this wee bit here but no:::: today” Marge comments as we drive around the block to check out a street that often has free spaces. In the developing course of our search certain goings on are noticeable to us for their likely consequences for the availability of roadside spaces such as the fact that there are roadworks blocking one area off. Not an area that is highly rated in terms of the search but its blocking off will push vehicles over into our streets. The streets also carry expectations in terms of what sorts of activities vehicle occupants will be doing when parked on them. Beside the strip of shops the expectation is both that parking meters with their time limits force cars to be moved at least every hour and that the vehicles belong to shoppers who will come and go fairly regularly (versus a nearby street of offices with longer term pay-parking where the cars will remain unmoved from morning till night). Time of day is a further contingency that can be used to account for an absence of spaces available and the expectation of them not becoming available soon. The approach of lunchtime or the end of the working day bringing a flurry of car moving. However in the vignette we are in mid-morning which carries no great hope of more or less freeing up of spaces.

The temporal course of the search

To return to the beginning of the vignette, when we enter the territory that will comprise our search and that our search comprises as a sensible territory, unavoidably we have to travel *toward* our destination (we do not materialise there to make a choice or travel *away* from it to reach it). Sequentially, we enter for a *first time* the zone that comprises the territory within which our search will take place. The search has a recognisable start that emerges at the border of the quarter we examined above, we have first impressions of what parking conditions are like. The particular hotel that is Marge’s current destination is still to come, so we do not yet know if there is the dreamed of perfect space just beside it. Yet we are now in the field of what Garfinkel (2002: 180) calls the “oriented objects” of the search. Marge is sitting on the [right side], I am on the [left side]. [Fronts of buildings] and [rears of buildings] pass by to the side as the car goes forward. Strips of parked cars are in lines that car is driving between (see the images above). Garfinkel proposes that left, right, ahead, passing by, are in the outset of the enterprise of looking for a parking space are a property of the event that is *just this* search. Their coherence as appearances *emerges* in the course of our journey and by their ongoing emerging they are never a Euclidean geometry. They are never, for any actor doing a search, objects suspended in a bucket of water.

As part of encountering this territory we initiate preliminary analyses of the leading streets in terms of: ‘how busy are they just now?’ We see recognisable features such as continuous rows of cars, illegal double-parking and other cars visibly searching for spaces, and find it to be busy¹¹. In the vignette the conversation between the

¹¹ At other times there can be discontinuous lines of parked cars, or cars parked so sparsely that we no longer see rows but rather see individual cars.

ethnographer and the driver is about parking fines but we can be fairly sure that Marge, knowing she is approaching her destination, is already building expectations as to the likelihood of finding a space outside her client's venue on *this* search. And this search is the thing that we want to investigate for its just-thisness, since it is what the search is in its 'endless, inexhaustibly coherent details' (Garfinkel 2002: 180).

A second recognisable period of the search begins as the car turns the corner to enter the specific one-way street running along the block where Marge's destination is located. At this point we are no longer assessing today's conditions of the quarter in general, we are now accountably slowing down the speed of the vehicle. Decelerating so as to avoid overshooting a space, so as to slow down the passing by of the lines of parked cars, and maximising the time we can possibly spend on this street without actually coming to a halt. While stopping the car and waiting would be the ideal, the traffic behind pushes us onwards. Slowing down is a method for reconfiguring the temporal frame of the search. This is made all the more noticeable on leaving the street and rejoining the urban clearway when we race along until we enter another parking street.

A further stage of the search is entered after we have passed by the destination street, having failed to find anything. At this point we are equipped with the certain knowledge that *this time* there was no parking space. In driving along in the neighbouring streets we examine the available spaces there a little more seriously. And on entering our target street, this passing through the territory is the *second* time around and this makes all the difference in the world. Where a first pass can be exploration, the second has to be dealt with as confirmation or disconfirmation. A relational configuration is built between the first and the second and those that follow. In the second we also have to deal with the misery that Marge is becoming late for the meeting with the client and that she may have to park far away and spend more time walking to the venue.

There is not the space here to do more than gesture toward the importance of first time, second time and third time, and the highly restricted number of "times" beyond these. While numbers of "minutes" are in some way relevant to the search, and we might want to say that after five minutes of searching around the blocks the time limit for this form of search is reached, the minutes do not account for features of second time around. Features such as: the street is full *again*, we'll go round the block one more time and so on. A search as measured out in "times" reaches a *reasonable* end by the third pass of the street. "Thirds" are used all over the place as organisational devices for numbers of actions before a reasonable end: third time lucky, three strikes in baseball and three guesses. When Marge finally compromises on, is what she calls a "well dodgy" space. It's key to note that this "well dodgy" space was there during the entirety of search but is only three quarters of the size it should be due to the poor parking of the two surrounding cars and it is also far away from Marge's destination. It only becomes an acceptable parking space as the third orbit if the city blocks approaches its end and a potential fourth lap is threatened.

Endogenous features of street traffic

Finding a parking space on the street would be so much easier if there were no other cars concurrently searching with us. What is especially frustrating is when what appear to be newcomers (e.g. ‘the bitch’) grab a recently freed space. Another of the problems facing those members of traffic cohorts searching for a space then is that while they can display *that* they are searching for a space they cannot display *how long* they have been searching for a space. The constant flow of traffic, the limited visibility in the canyons of the streets, new searchers arriving from all direction and the relatively random freeing up of spaces to be taken deprives searchers of the opportunities to assemble themselves into a proper accountable queue¹². This can be a blessing too, since you can be the lucky vehicles that arrives at your destination just as a car leaves their space.

In the vignette there are several other cars witnessably searching for parking spaces and this is exhibited in their slower pace compared to the rest of the traffic. From the front view, in contra-flow, the recognisable by the direction of their occupants looking (e.g. toward the sides of the road) as they slowly approach. Each circulating searcher is attending to the lines of parked cars for a space or a sign of a car about to leave their space. A name for this practical problem which parking space searchers are involved in is what we might call a ‘musical chairs’ element of searching as constituted out of and in traffic, except the music never stops and we cannot tell when someone will offer us a chair to sit down on.

In the video we formulate a further problem – the accidental queue:

_____ Transcript

E: What’s even worse is when you’re behind another car

M: Yeah I know, who’s looking obviously

E: and they’re going to get first (pause) choice

Marge and I were aware that the feature that emerged in the searching traffic, even with only one car is in front, and unrelated to actual time spent searching, was a recognisable *queue of cars*. Once such a thing is visible, even if unintended, its properties can then be exploited by the car visibly at the front of the queue and suffered by the car that finds itself in second place. Noticing that we are sitting behind another slow-moving searcher at this point we slow down still further to let the car in front go far enough ahead that we no longer constitute a queue in which we are in second place. Other troubles that emerge from the rules of the road are that should a space free up on the wrong side of the road but the right side for a more distant car, then that car can exploit being on the correct side for parallel

¹² Off-street pay car parks, by contrast, provide lanes for drivers to line up as queues, and as queues for no particular space.

parking. Or as in what appeared to be the case for the ‘bitch’, they can be turning into an adjacent street ahead of you, even though you have ‘seen’ the space first, their vehicle is able to place themselves adjacent to the space before you can and thus establish their right to take it.

Some comparisons might also be made with how newly arrived customers in a café “hover” to display their status as waiting for a table. Those occupying tables can see that their table is wanted right now, they are requested by the steady stares of the waiting and usually, in various ways, the table’s vacating. The comparison brings out something of what is specific to this kind of search for parking. The café is typically an open space where those with seats can easily monitor the status of other customers, moreover customers searching for a seat can display their status as waiting with ease and they can stare extendedly at tables whose drinks and food are visibly finished. That parked cars are unattended by their drivers, that the streets are canyons between buildings and that cars searching must constantly move on all present a distinct set of problems in this form of search. There only intermittent occasions where a parked driver on returning to their car finds themselves the object of attention of a waiting car and may (or may not to the annoyance of a car in the ‘fragile’ position of waiting) hurry their entering, starting and moving of their vehicle to allow the waiting vehicle to take their space.

Searching together as driver and passenger

Clearly a key task for the vehicle within the territory of this search and in competition with other cars is spotting courses of action, such as noted above, that indicate a car may be leaving their space and so position their vehicle that it is the vehicle waiting for *just that* space. What you can catch in the vignette and from the original video is elements of how Marge and myself do “looking for a space” together as “driver” and “passenger”. In the case of ‘the bitch’ you can witness how we analyse and morally assess what other vehicles are in the course of doing. Earlier in the vignette when we arrived unsuccessfully for the first time at the end of the street-block containing our destination, I point across to some on street parking on a block on the far side of the clearway. ‘What about there? Is that too far?’ In response Marge says “maybe” and entertains the possibility that we will give a road two blocks away a try. What is of interest is that Marge is observably engaged in monitoring the traffic to get out of the side street on to the lane on the opposite side. I, as the passenger, can see consequently that she is watching the traffic and look beyond the traffic to check out a parking area. As various other studies of socially organised looking have noted (Goodwin 1997; Hindmarsh and Heath 2000), each member monitors the others’ looking to check on what they are looking at as part of the courses of activity they are engaged in and as part of the very visibility of those courses of activity. Marge is observably in moving her torso forward, her movements paced to the vehicles trajectories across our view from our vehicle, and expectedly as a driver, involved in looking at the cross traffic.

The fact of the search and its courseness has implications for the evolving expectation and moreover entitlement of the passenger to assist in looking for a

space¹³. Viz at the beginning of the search I am not doing much looking at all, as the first orbit continues I begin to look in parallel with Marge and later in the vignette I am looking extendedly and scrupulously along lateral streets. These thorough inspections of side streets are something that the driver finds difficult while driving and that a passenger can do and report back to the driver.

The competent “passenger” shifts categorically assigned responsibilities from a quiet passive role during the search for a parking space because there is work that needs to be done that the driver who is observably and accountably engaged in monitoring us as a unit driving in traffic cannot do. The passenger, when the driver is required to be fully engaged in dealing with demands of driving becomes akin to the “look-out” on a ship and, while not having the architectural assistance of a crow’s nest or the magnification of telescopes, they can still scan the lengths of streets for the tell-tale signs of existing spaces or spaces emerging.

When we finally select the “well dodgy” space to try and park the car in, I monitor the gap on the passenger side of the car. Alongside some inappropriate suggestions about blocking the other car door, I report “you’re fine on this side.” In this way and others the passenger is involved in the work of transport, seeing during parking what the driver cannot see all that well or at all from their side. The passenger’s reports are addressed to assisting the driver in the work of manoeuvring as a car, in ways that of course the driver does not have to make similar reports back to the passenger (who is obviously not manoeuvring). The joint and complimentary monitoring of a vehicle’s movements is more obvious in the docking of ships, parking of airplanes and driving of military tanks, yet even in the case of driving ‘small’ vehicles like Marge’s it is clear that the passenger is not merely cargo.

Concluding remarks

I would suggest that the passenger’s involvement in the tasks of searching a car is under-appreciated in the majority of the research investigating driver behaviour. And note that the term used all too often in behavioural studies is “driver” rather than, for instance, the *practice of driving*, wherein driving as a social practice frequently involves the assistance of the passengers during appropriate occasions such as searching for something in the terrain, map-reading, sign-reading, getting hold of money or documents for barriers, controlling the radio, edging around obstacles and so on.¹⁴ The many windows of the car make it all the easier for passengers to become involved in looking related to driving. Goodwin makes similar points about organisation of visual apparatuses in relation to ships at sea:

¹³ In Rod Watson’s work on the crews of forest trucks, he notes the ways in which assistance from passengers is occasioned by visible tiredness in the driver, the shared assessment of road as a particularly demanding stretch and simple requests from the driver.

¹⁴ In his studies of driving fire trucks on dangerous mountain tracks in forests, Watson (1999) emphasizes the ways in which the crew assist the driver when they enter what are recognisably (to the experienced crews) hazardous stretches of road. At other times the driver is left alone and passenger involvement might on those sections of road constitute backseat driving, annoying interruptions etc.

the visual (and other properties) of settings structure environments that shape, on an historical time scale, the activities systematically performed within those settings. A very simple example is provided by the bridge of the oceanographic ship which not only had a window facing forward so the helmsman could steer the ship and watch for trouble, but also a window facing backwards. This was used by a winch operator who had the task of lifting heavy instrument packages in and out of the sea. Though being used here to do science, this arrangement is in fact a systematic solution to a repetitive problem faced by sailors, such as fishermen using nets, who have to manoeuvre heavy objects while at sea. Solutions found to these tasks, such as the rear facing window with the visual access it provides (as well as the forward window facilitating navigation), are built into the tools that constitute the work environments used by subsequent actors faced with similar tasks. (Goodwin 2000: 168)

In this article I have also emphasized that the space of the search is anything but a Euclidean space. The activity delineates the territory and vice versa, and relevant features are made so by their relevance to the activity in question: searching for a parking space, as against taking a shortcut between A & B or cruising along the motorway (Laurier 2004). These features are such things as the street on which destination is located, streets where parking is legal, short or long term, far away streets and nearby streets, the car in front of us, the car behind and so on. Time does not stand alone as a measure but rather is marked out in the emerging properties of the search, so that the search has a beginning and then has 'laps' around city blocks. Time is crucial and yet has to be understood as thoroughly enmeshed in the practice which it is part of, lying between the time that drivers are making in their speed and slowness and the time that is marked in laps and of course by what time they are due wherever they are due. What will be selected as an acceptable object for the search is adjusted during the search, not smoothly but stepwise as each 'orbit' accumulates ordinally (ie first, second & third).

The search is not only social in the sense of involving a passenger (should there be one) it is done in what Lynch and others call the 'society of traffic' and amongst those cars who by their vehicularly embodied movements relative to surrounding traffic are recognised as also being searchers for parking spaces. Done, then, as part of a group of concurrent searchers it constitutes a social space with inferentially rich categorisations of other vehicles as competitors, aggressors, takers, givers, 'idiots', 'bitches' and 'nice persons'. These assessments of motive and morality are bound up with the particular rights embodied in the order of traffic, such as first car, second car in a group. Yet there are persistent problems of traffic in what cannot be exhibited, such as in this case, how long a car has been searching and the need that its occupants now feel that they have acquired, beyond that of other arriving drivers.

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